



A Theory of Realistic Representation in Henry James

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Abstract

A dimension of the later style of the fiction of Henry James is its deep concern not with selves and identities but with images and appearances. These works typically picture the character in in-between situations where he is recognized not as he really is but as he shows himself, as he appears in projected situations. However, another aspect of James's later style is the magnificence of the appearance, because appearance is the outcome of reciprocal spaces which in turn signify vivified and productive relations among the agents of the narrative. These facades of James's later style render it a space for a new mode of realistic representation which depends on a new kind of verisimilitude, the story in the service of language, and consciousness dramatization. And the watershed of the Jamesian verisimilitude is the work of successive centers of consciousness from where the tale is narrated. In addition, to show the deepest layers of the human soul, James's narrator can occasionally go beyond the frontiers of language and take use of the non-verbal structures of culture also. This mode of fiction mainly wants to exhibit the consciousness in the process of evolution. And it shows "the real" not as what has so far been considered as real, but as what emerges in this modern analytical consciousness.

Key words: James; Fiction; The real; Appearance; Representation; Consciousness; Verisimilitude

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INTRODUCTION

Standing in the midway between the English traditionally realistic Story, and the modern unrealistic novel which is mainly psychological also, the fiction of James serves to make people more civilized not through imitation but mainly through revision, criticism, and thoughtful meditation and interpretation. To achieve this goal, it puts more emphasis not on action and plot but on point of view, characterization, language, and discourse.

The present paper intends to discuss some of the strategies of realistic representation in the later style of the fiction of Henry James. The freedom of the novelist to achieve formal and thematic creations, the role of the illusion of reality, the use of the scenic method in fiction, story in the service of language, and story with mis-placed centers are among these strategies. Also, it will argue that the scenic method provided a possibility for James the modern novelist to take use of dramatic techniques. However, the novelist has a privilege which the playwright does not have: the possibility to go round the language to the blessing of which he creates a central vision which, acting like a careful lookout, not only sees and hears to the benefit of representation, but also analyzes and interprets what the characters do and say in the story. After that, the short story "the Real Thing" will be analyzed to argue that in the fiction of James the real goes hand in hand with the unreal. This means that reality is only what the narrative discourse creates in the consciousness of the character and reader. It will be shown that in James the real and the imaginary, or life and art, originate from one another.

ARGUMENT

"The Art of Fiction"

Henry James's "The Art of Fiction" is perhaps the most definitive and the most applicable theory for the analysis of realistic prose literature. At the opening of this

work, James argues that due to the lack of a theoretical background, the Victorian English novel before him could take almost no determining role in the cultural promotion of the society. He notes that the want of formulation in novel was due to a sever antagonism of the English society against this genre, because the society considered the novel not only superstitious but immoral also. However, James reminds his reader that there is a genuine truth why novels are written and read: "The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it *does* compete with life. When it ceases to compete ..., it will have arrived at a very strange pass" (Baym *et al.*, 1994, p. 431).

If to compete with life for a novel means (re)creating a kind of virtual reality through representation, then the novelist should express legitimate and truthful ideas. This also suggests that the novelist treats his subject matter seriously, because the ideas with which he works are as thoroughly documentary as those of the historian. However, the job of the novelist is even more difficult than the job of the historian, because although "To represent and illustrate the past, the actions of men, is the task of either writer, ..., the difference ... is, in proportion ..., to the honor of the novelist in collecting his evidence, which is so far from being purely literary" (*ibid.*, p. 433). If materials of history come from the life documents of a past society, materials of the novel originate mainly from the consciousness of a great author as he reads and recreates those documents in the sphere of his critical imagination.

However, it is also in the light of the commitment of the novelist to formal considerations that his work satiates the reader's desire for moral perfection and psychological promotion. Therefore, besides for the meaning, the novelist should be careful about the production of due forms and structures for his work. To achieve this purpose, the novelist takes seemingly unlimited freedom to create whatever kind of form which he needs, while it makes his work dependent on his artistic sensibilities and personal impressions. On the other hand, one cannot claim that the novelist is limitlessly free in the creation of new forms and meanings, because always there should be some one-to-one links between the taste of the novelist and the things of life, between the imaginary and the experience. James says this "air of reality" is "the supreme virtue of the novel," and asserts that all other merits of the novel "helplessly and submissively depend" on this merit (Baym *et al.*, 1994, p. 437). Therefore, it seems that the realism of a novel (by James) is achieved mainly in a formal process where the personal taste of the novelist is also a determining factor: a process for creating an illusion of reality via the genesis of due (language) forms and structures on the basis of the personal tastes and impressions of a central seer who freely opens his consciousness for fulfilling the requirements of representation.

Strategies of Representation

In the fiction of Henry James, amusement is the outcome of discovery and demystification, for each of his stories seems to have something in another story so that his whole work is, to speak for Robert Marks (1960), "a shapely crystal box of compartments, springs, and tricks" (p. 159). There is almost no road in the field of his fiction to direct the reader to the center of it. Instead, each of his work makes a labyrinth where the reader has to find his way in a maze of different tracks and turns. His later style takes a number of forms and/or strategies which he uses to found a monument of fiction with a thousand windows at the forefront. Among these forms and strategies are the story in the service of language, the use of unreliable narrator, the total absence of the author from narration, story within story, story with more than one center, and the consciousness of the main character under the observation of other characters. His fiction gives a maximum of enjoyment which is the outcome of communication, interpretation, recognition, appreciation, etc.. Therefore, the values of his fiction are vivid and clear while its payment is large. If reading is an exercise of penetration, reading James gives out the most numerous secrets. On the other hand, a full appreciation of the later style of James, which is often odd and eccentric, needs interest, practice, perseverance, and critical perception.

Notwithstanding, a novel by James is a unified work of art where various sources of interest come together to render it as a unique structure. Although his stories are often multi-vocal, their individual voices are functional only if they converge to a central light. In this way, one can claim that reading James is a task of appreciation, and different elements of his work cling together to make it possible for us to listen to a friendly voice. Yet, his typical story can leave us unappreciative, while he casts no immediate spell over the reader. His great novels, which are multilateral in construction also, can put a lot of things in the shadow, behind the curtain, or at the back of the reader, so as his perceptive eyes do not see them. But they can shed enough light on many parts for the reader. Its numerous sides render it as a phenomenon the beauty of which comes not only from the form, but also from the meaning, and from the atmospheric truth which it delivers.

In addition, a redeeming feature of the best work of James is a historicity that links the past times to the present. It shows the past time, the times of Renaissance for example, moving forward and reaching the frontiers of the present time (of James) to give its plentiful graces to modernity. At the outset of *The Golden Bowl* (1995), when Prince Amerigo comes onto the first scene, he likes "his London, when he had come to him; he was one of the modern Romans who find by the Thames a more convincing image of the truth of the ancient state than any they have left by the Tiber" (p. 3). The present cultural manifestations seem trite and inadequate in magnificence.

Therefore, for the trust or credibility of its affluent material consumerism, the present civilizations should model themselves on the Renaissance ideals of Rome where the things of life were not the products of peace and technology but perhaps the spoils of plundering.

It is to this purpose that in his later fiction James provides enough grounds of intelligibility that is fertilized in the act of reading also, for the consciousness of the reader is thereby expanded to encompass a composite of landscapes, of social situations, and of the weight of history. The character of the dying Milly Theale in *The Wings of the Dove* and the gilded vessel in *The Golden Bowl*, that infuse the impressions of morality and beauty and wealth, are the products of such synthetic operations. And the lack of an omniscient point of view in the later works of James provides the reader with the possibility of achieving such a synthesis, because as the central consciousness, it is his reflective mind that gives shape to the characters and their incidents.

A novel is, for James, a system for the representation of a meaning; and composition is a pre-requisite of representation, the application of the principle that the whole of a novel should hang together and nothing should be irrelevant to the other things. But the structure of a Jamesian novel is also unique. It can have no core, perhaps no center at all; or if it has a center, it is in perpetual pain of an unavoidable vacancy, so that the center always de-structures itself. A typical novel by James gives additional dimensions to our lives. We love it for what it shows us: it gives us education, it gives us new forms; and it vivifies our lives. It brings us to visit those regions of our consciousness with which we usually are not confronted. In this way, his novels are the means by which we plow our minds and cultivate them. They renew our lives and give new dimensions to them. They help us to deepen and broaden our consciousnesses, and to develop our personalities.

Our human life is scarcely satisfactory, and is ugly and unsavory, because it is often devoid of generosity, honesty, etc.. On the other hand, a novel is not, for James, the manifest of an ideology or a theory for bettering life, because no certain ethical, moral, or political system finds immediate and consistent voice in it. A novel can be the voice of a dreaming personality, the life story of an unhappy temperament who endeavors to transcend his consciousness. James believes that (novelistic) art makes life more bearable and beautiful by putting it into form and order, because it changes the confusions of life to balance and harmony. Such a novel is an artistic representation of (slices of) life, of life looked from different perspectives by observant onlookers.

In this way, in the fiction of James theory and ideology is secondary to the representation of a façade of experience in a domain of practical language, for what is of prime significance is the field of life, that is, the state of the soul, the mind picture of a main character,

the texture of his feeling, and the atoms of his sensation. Thus, what makes the reader of James really excited is not the movement of the (external) action but the evolution of the mind of a (main) character, how he starts to see things differently from the way he used to see them at the beginning. In the treatment of its subject, the Jamesian novel deals with human relations, and the identity of the character is formulated mostly through his relations with other people. In *The Ambassadors* for example, the reader is always anxious to learn about if Chad Newsome in Paris is, as it is in the air, really sexually attached to a bad woman, or if Lambert Strether, the American intellectual envoy to Europe, will remain faithful to the American codes of conduct the mark of which is his faithfulness to his fiancée Mrs. Newsome. However, the main care of the reader of this work is something else: the transcendence (or the evolution) of the mind and heart of the envoy, because the reader should mainly like to discover why and how he changes his outlook about the Parisian culture so profoundly that he occasionally even doubts if he should remain in Paris or should return home.

The "Scenic Method"

The thought behind the scenic method in the later style of James originated from his experiences when he was trying to compose drama, and James the modern novelist was surely more inspired by dramatic art. The scenic method implies the approximation of a general rhythm of the narrative form to the successive acts of a play. It is, to speak for Marks again, "the utility for a narrative plan of the principle of the scenario" (p. 165). It stands for the application of a method in story-telling which mixes narrative and dramatic techniques and which fits both of them in the ultimate product. Thus, James was concerned with modeling the movement of the action in his narrative on the movement of action in the play. An outcome of this concern is that each stage of his typical narrative, and the order and sequence of each stage, as well as each of its turns and members, is, like in a drama, life in a close march of cause and effect.

We know the characters of James dramatically; that is, not directly by referential narrative but via the picture they show us of what they are; and as they unfold their action, we know them more comprehensively. Each act of a play or each book of a novel is like a light that illuminates a phase of the subject. Each division has its own philosophy and systematic movement, its own question, and its own development and promise, and each incident takes the action a step forward toward the main climax. The main force, which is the force of an antithesis, comes from a sharp contrast, and a Jamesian novel is the drama of a conflict. The conflict is, like the conflict of Kate Croy against Milly Theale (in *The Wings of the Dove*) or that of Charlotte Stant against Maggie Verver (in *The Golden Bowl*), acted out around a loss or gain; it hangs in the balance of power and it dissolves into a solution in case

of imbalance. After this stage of recognition, the essential question comes to the fore as to the scenic method in James: what will happen, who will suffer, who not suffer? In any picture of a conflict, a figure has his decisions to make and his consequences to meet.

James organizes the novel "as an action to give it bony structure, to give it *line* on which to string the pearls of detail" (Marks, 1960, p. 167). His compositional procedures as novelist and dramatist are ruled by the march of action, the rise and progress, as well as the culmination and solution of a crisis. In the novel, there is a sequence of thoroughly expressed occasions that are, like a dramatic act, architecturally combined; and each occasion presents a piece of the construction and corresponds to the well-structured act of the drama. What a character says or does in a given social occasion is the result of his sense of the situation or his sensibility to the crisis. It is the culmination of a process of vision, a feeling, or a consciousness that has been working within the person, and the reader can verify the formation of the process in the consciousness of the characters. However, that which testifies the scene is not the act of vision but is the end result of it.

Dramatic art is direct and objective, and the playwright is therefore prevented from "going behind" the spoken word for the representation of a character that simply and motionlessly sees without leaving a chair or being approached by another person. But the art of the novelist is not only indirect, but is subjective also. For Marks, James's art is in "directly subjective picturing of an 'existing' inner life, an under-lying soul state, with going behind to compass explanations and amplifications, motives and sentiments" (p. 168). James dramatizes the psychological states of his characters often in the realms of language and by the power of the word. However, his reader can witness many occasions where, in the illustration of cultural complexities and/or innermost soul ingredients of his persons, he goes beyond the frontiers of language.

Marks affirms that handling these arts cannot be the job of the playwright, because for treating his occasion, the playwright has only one choice: dialogue. In addition, the logic of the playwright is a one-way logic. It is the logic of the characters who talk while they are intensely confronted. Such a talk makes a really constructive dialogue which is organic and dramatic, which speaks for itself, and which represents and embodies both substance and form. But the novelist has more than one choice. Besides dialogue, he has access to narrative representation and foreshortening also. So, the novel is more flexible in form than drama. The situation represented in the novel depends both on the situated person and on the mentality of the person as to his situation. This is because the reader (of James) should not only evaluate the formation of the world and history, but should also determine how his characters envision such appearances, that is, how he perceives and analyzes such discursive and non-discursive formations.

The later James stays in the mind of his characters for examining their interests, illustrating their reflections, and letting them as the center of his stories to determine the things and rules of their being. Therefore, when the reader of James recognizes his characters in the best way, the text gives him a direct picture of his (complicated) consciousness, while it enables him to probe into his experiences and to understand the obscurities of his deepest motives. Meanwhile, for the effect of such a process of vision, and in order to make no reluctant halt in it, James would say the novelist should stick to what the reader knows as the center of vision. In a narrative, the main character may have a usurping consciousness, whereas in a drama the consciousness of the hero is exhibited in the same way as that of the other characters. What happens in a drama happens only to those who are concerned, and it refers only to them. But in his "house of fiction" the novelist employs at the same time a number of successive centers which work in alternation in such a way that the resulting construction is made of many corner stones.

A play is made exclusively of the spoken word. But in a novel, the report about the spoken word is also seminal. Such a report directly illustrates something that is given to us by another method, by picture, for example. Thus, as a gate through which the reader enters the mind of the character, picture suggests what a character sees. It serves as a survey of the impressions and ideologies of the character. Picture helps the reader to realize what the character sees in the appointed circumstances, and allows him to perceive how he feels about the constructed situations. It lays bare the fermentation in the heart of the character as the outcome of different sensibilities. Picture also provides the ground for a full solidification of the values of the scene, for its contrast allows our appreciation of the values to take full attestation. The reported situation is typically not the account of the novelist, but is what he perceives of somebody's impression of the account. The form of the report also excites the interest and sympathy of the reader. In this way, illustrating the perception of the character and representing his reflected appreciation in the appointed situation, the picture makes it possible for the author to shed enough light on him.

A novelist who is a novelist cannot prefer common or simple characters, because his characters should be clever and competent, and their consciousness should have much value. Additionally, if a novelist like James is without experience about the meaner conditions of life (like when he does not know about the lower manners and types), he feels weakness. On the contrary, if he can help his readers feel kinship and sympathy with good characters, it should prove a bonus for his narrative technology. This is because he feels committed to transcend his readers in the way of culture, and therefore he prefers to make his reader more sensible to the full and rich, and less so to the poor and meager.

A Jamesian character in the foreground is a field of common interest between the author and the reader, for the

author searches in him for the values in which the reader is also interested. Such a character, whom the critical situation has tested, and the test he has passed, can expose the reader to (all) the values he wants to equip himself with. Such a main character has an excited feeling about these values. Moreover, his passion, his intelligence, and his sincerity, as well as the force of the critical moment are enough perhaps to drill all his values into the reader. In such a situation, direct reporting can be a great danger, for it shows the main character as wanting sincerity. But a great author like James reports always indirectly and in a detached manner. He reports “only through the reflective imagination and moral nerves of the troubled life at the center of his subject used as the basis of vision” (Marks, 1960, p. 175).

The indirect method of representation, the role of the scenic method, and the sympathy of the reader with the character often intensify the vivification of the constructed picture in James. This kind of drama is for representing not only the story of a hero but also the mentality of other characters of the hero. In a Jamesian novel, and because of his commitment to the mission of the story-teller as the architect of culture, the author may also stand impartial to the deeds of some or all of his characters. As a result, his reader is under a great force to discover how the story works not only as a language construction but also as a device for cultural architecture. Thus, the main interest of James the modernist comes from the fact that he reports what he appreciates of the experiences of his character. Henry James is perhaps the greatest expert to institute the habit in us to see through thoughts and things.

The Real in James

Adam Sonstegard (2003) says the idea of James’s short story “The Real Thing” began “when two Londoners, who were down on their luck, applied as models to George Du Maurier, a personal friend of James’s who drew satirical society cartoons for the magazine *Punch*” (p. 173). Sonstegard reports that the cartoonist shared the anecdote with James who developed the idea into his story. Therefore, the whole story is a vision. It is also a transformation of the life impressions of a painter-narrator into a handful of narrative experiences, into pieces of (fictitious) truth.

Major and Mrs. Monarch should urgently do something for their lives, for they have fallen on hard times. Therefore, they want the narrator-painter to sketch them off for the illustrations which he draws for the society novels dealing with the English aristocracy. But the painter, who “looked to a different branch of art,” is disappointed with them, because he searches in them for something which he does not find: something which is on the side of the imaginary, and therefore goes beyond the frontiers of the real.

Mrs. Monarch is so like a “Beautiful Statue” that her sketch will not appeal to the senses of the consumers.

As the story expands, it shows a dichotomy between the real and the represented, and the narrator prefers the represented, perhaps in an anti-mimetic sense, over the real. Art does not reproduce the world only with a so-called photographic realism, but in the construction of a narrative discourse, it adds to the beauty and refinement of its truth also, and makes it inclined toward the transcendental. Such a kind of virtual existence, which is the product of verisimilitude via representation, is superior to the real life, because if the real life is often ugly and static and disorderly, this artistically represented life is clarified and methodic and transformed.

Miss Churm, a freckled cockney girl, is a model of the older times than the Monarchs. When she comes in, and the narrator starts describing her, the reader is left to design a formula for a severe opposition between art and truth, appearance and reality. On the contrary to Mrs. Monarch, the story says she is “such an ample heroine of romance” (Baym *et al.*, 1994, p. 322). Miss Churm represents a “Russian Princess”, but Mrs. Monarch readily admits that she cannot turn it around. And when we read Mrs. Monarch is “too insurmountably stiff, ..., the real thing, but always the same” (ibid, p. 324), we realize that she is much different from Miss Churm. If the latter has all the faculties needed for the play of art to convert her into an artistic representation, the former is a fragile skeleton which is good almost for nothing in the realm of the imaginary, because in the person of her the density of the real does not allow for the function of “the alchemy of art”.

And “the close union” of Mrs. Monarch and her husband makes them more emphatically inadequate for the purpose, perhaps because their radical devotion to each other paralyzes their imagination, limits their outlook, and makes them detached from the social and historical realities. The deadened imagination of Mr. Monarch has transferred him back to a comfortable world of negligence, and he cannot be imaginatively reproduced in the high level of the painter’s transcendence. If abstraction, arrangement, and idealization are integrated into the painter’s transcendence, the presence of Monarch is the context of a historically aristocratic reality which is replete with the practical features of an uncultivated life.

Thus, this story is an interesting address to the problem of realistic representation. There is a difference in the mode of representation between the Renaissance times of “Raphael and Leonardo” and the present time. The Renaissance tradition of mimesis, which would basically avoid the variety of everyday life and current experiences, used to re-enliven only the established norms, types, and characters. Hence, the everyday life experiences would come into the compass of no mimetic art, because it was not elevated and truthful enough. Of the wide spectrum of the real life, the Renaissance art, as it seems, would cover only a small range where representation could typicalize the norms and values not of the mass people

but of the privileged classes of a hierarchical society. But in the times of modernity representation is a more ambitiously demanding endeavor, because it is more closely committed to the reality of everyday life of the mass people. If Renaissance representation would imply mimetic idealism, modern representation is committed to the actors of daily life, and to their knowledge, experience, and psychology.

"The Real Thing" is also the story of how the life around the narrator-painter is portrayed in his consciousness. Life intrudes his imagination in the form of a series of pictures which he then organizes into the context of his tale. The model Oronte, who is an Italian street-vendor, is as well-suited for mimesis as Miss Churm, because he is, for the painter of life, the source and space of a number of simultaneous pictures as the watersheds of representation. The story reads,

Suddenly it struck me that this very attitude of expression made a picture; whereupon I told him to sit down and wait till I should be free. There was another picture in the way he obeyed me, and I observed as I worked that there were others still in the way he looked wonderingly, with his head thrown back, about the high studio. He might have been crossing himself in Saint Peter's. Before I finished I said to myself "The fellow's a bankrupt orange-monger, but a treasure" (Baym *et al.*, 1994, p. 326).

The fully imaginative narrator visualizes the modes of being of the people. In the sphere of his imagination, he takes pictures not only of their attitudes, but also of the styles of their conduct, and of their feelings and passions. The question now is how he can picture an "attitude of expression". He does it "the way he [Oronte]¹ obeyed me", or "the way he looked wonderingly"? Or is it the very report of the narrator (about these acts) that transforms them into pictures? If such a picture is photographic, it is also (the source of) an artistic creation, the product of representation. However, representation is clearly more artistic than photography. It is photography embedded in which is artistic imagination, photography plus the magic of the verbal signification. In other words, in the position of a painter, James (and/or the narrator) makes a series of images of his own impressions of the manners of the model, but in the position of a narrator, he develops these pictures into portraits, into materials of verbal representation.

But what happens in the act of telling (in) James's story? Jonathan Culler (2000) admits that "language performs actions rather than merely reports on them" (p. 505). This means that to the blessing of the words enacted in telling or narrating, not only realities but also stories about realities take place. In tale-telling, whether it is done by the author in writing or by the reader in reading, the words are enacted in a way that they perform a whole world with its own logic and privileges.

Also, the act of telling implies that the author, the text,

and the reader interact in the (re)making of a discourse as a formula of socialization. This in turn means that story as text is an inter-text also, the string that binds all the pearls of experience in the historical institute of the literary culture. In this sense, every fiction is a playground where a number of separate social forces (symbolically) interact for the emergence of new facts and identities.

On the other hand, the act of reading makes literature as hugely diversified as the whole readers. And when in the introduction to *The Portrait of a Lady* James claims that the "house of fiction" has numberless windows in the forefront, he perhaps also means literature in the sense of a material for reading and reasoning. James says these windows are so numerous that we cannot count them. Appealing to his imagination, or under the pressure of his will, every reader opens a window in the global monument of literature through which he critically observes a facade of the human experience.

In "The Real Thing", when the Monarchs visit the painter for a second time, they find Oronte sitting as his model. When they see the portraits which he has drawn of him, they are stricken. However, the narrator says when he was drawing the Monarchs he "couldn't anyhow get away from them – get into the character I wanted to represent" (Baym *et al.*, 1994, p. 327), for there was nothing in them of the falsity or fakeness that he needed for representing truth. Therefore, the problem with the Monarchs is that they are too real to suggest reality, that their severe reality nullifies the strategy of representation, because what is needed for representation is not naked reality, but is sign, figuration, or appearance. A copy is different from representation, and although the Monarchs copy the English gentry, they represent no genuine truth of it, for they are too inflexible to perform the transference that is essential for such a representation. Therefore, a representation of something is also more complete than a copy of it; because a copy is only photographic, but representation is artistic also. Photography lacks the human elements that are vital in representation, and if a copy is mechanical, a representation is something achieved through artistic imagination.

Now a little bit about the congruity between picture and text in the story of James. The fact that his story-teller is a painter also signifies that for a realistic representation of a slice of life, a narrative like this can use the text-and-image double-device. What the painter produces is another expression of what the story-teller makes. A painting is unreal in the sense that it is only a series of lines and colors, like a story which is unreal in the sense that it is only a series of language signs or symbols. Thus, the ingenuity of both picture and language is clear enough, because they are signs rather than selves. However, if in a painting the relation among the lines and the fitness of

¹ My adding.

lines and colors make meaningful forms, in a story also the relation (and the difference) between signs make meaningful structures. Likewise, when one sits as a model, one wants to be showy, false, and fake, because one wants to represent somebody that one is not. In the “deceptive atmosphere of art” the most useful bricolage is sign rather than self, appearance rather than reality. Therefore, the Monarchs can inspire nothing more than bad illustrations, for they are on the side of the real not appearance, and they lack the elasticity, the figurality, which is needed for an artistic creation. If in life it is the tangible reality that is vital, in art it is the illusion, the phantom, or the imaginary that is of prime value.

Therefore, what does it mean in the world of fiction to say something is real? Does it mean that this something is not a documentary report but is just fiction? That it is not a truthful account of something in the external world? That on the contrary to a historical account or a geographical description for example, it has no reference in the world but its reference in only an illusion? The law of realistic fiction turns on the principle of possibility, on the principle that whatever we can imagine is categorically possible. This means that the reader knows that if this or that description is true, such and such a thing will happen. But such a law does not exist independently of fiction. It is neither nonsensical nor impossible but is fictionally possible. Notwithstanding, if it is fictional, the question is about the root and meaning of its realism.

The possibility of tale-telling emerges, among other things, from the nature of language, while the possibility of cognitive operations as to life origins from fiction, from narrativity. Also, the metaphoric nature of language implies the existence of a fantastic world, which is other than our world, and with which it shares a handful of values which is in turn the possibility of bestowing meaning upon our expressions. Now, a text of realistic fiction, where the minutes of life are subjected to the microscopic analyses of reading, makes the reader set aside his knowledge about the fictionality of his dealings. Thus, a different kind of recognition, or a new kind of ontological space, which is epistemological also, emerges in the consciousness of the reader, for he knows that what he is reading is only fictitious. But he also accepts the illusion of the textual discourse, because he reconsiders his own ideas about the world. This is not to mean that realistic fiction dissolves the consciousness of the reader as epics and fairy tales do, but that the verisimilitude in the realistic fiction is highly functional, that the content of such a story, where consecutive pictures of the here and now are exposed to the reader, excites him to link the textual content together with the world outside it.

If a story is to be a reframing of the models of intelligibility, the author overlooks whatever element that is trite or outdated in the cultural field. But if it is a realistic representation of life, he feels committed to his story, for its plot should follow the logic of the real life.

However, in the fiction of James a peculiar subjectivity converts the minutest contents of life into the experience of a story. The elements most solidly specified in his fiction suggest that the patterns of his representations are in good concordance with those of life: the problems of Maisie Farange (in *What Maisie Knew*) in coping with the folks around her before developing a moral sense, the pressures of Isabel Archer (in *The Portrait of A Lady*) when she understands that she has to endure a cruel husband whom she no longer loves, the agonies of Lambert Strether (in *The Ambassadors*) when he discovers that he has mistaken about the affair between Chad Newsome and Madame de Vionnet, the jerks of Merton Densher (in *The Wings of the Dove*) when he continually fights with poverty or when he is crippled by the impediments of his love to Kate Croy, or the pangs of Milly Theale (in *The Wings*) and Maggie Verver (in *The Golden Bowl*) when they realize that they have been deceived by the people who are (or are not?) like themselves.

Therefore, it can be suggested that in James’s fiction the represented experience is nourished from the raw materials of the real. Meantime, a problem is that unshapely reality is larger than life, and is therefore inadequate for the represented experience. Thus, in the process of imaginative realization, a great author like James adds something to the real to represent it effectively in the form of a novelistic discourse. A dimension of this realization is that his characters are typical and inclusive although they are not limited in the ordinary: Kate for her ability to arrange things and exploit the people for her benefit, Strether for his microscopic discernment that allows him to change his mind as many times as he needs for a genuine analysis of the Parisian culture, and Charlotte Stant for her outstanding courage to pass over the social norms and go as far in pursuit of her pleasures as to commit adultery with the son-in-law of her husband.

If poetry deals with the universals of experience, prose fiction deals with the particulars of it. Now, the question is how the prose style of James shows the particulars of life in a narrative that is like poetry, if not in verbal usage, at least in intention and effect. J. M. Cameron (1984) proposes the idea of “the concrete universal: that distinguishable entity which despite its particularity embodies in itself the features of a class” (p. 305). By this feature in the work of James, I guess Cameron means that he uses the particular to represent the universal: using what constructs our common sense; using the advantages of the universal types of literary writing like a fable or a legend; using archetypal kinds like the cruel father, the social trespasser, or the intellectual onlooker; creating and using artistic environments like studios, museums, and art galleries for the application of the imaginative power of his readers; using situations in which friends and families come together around a tea table or in a card game to partake in intellectual negotiations; using imaginary

situations in which a character leaves his home land to open his eyes to the secrets of a foreign history or culture, etc..

At the same time, seeing how Aristotelian tragedy is different from Jamesian fiction leads to another side of realism in the work of the American novelist. In *Poetics*, plot is more important than character which is designed mainly to perform a series of actions, because without plot there is no story. It is only in the significance of the performed action that the character proves his identity and absorbs the attention of the reader. But in the preface to *The American* James makes it clear that it is the character that supremely matters.

The interest of everything is all that it is his vision, *his* conception, *his* interpretation: at the window of his wide, quite sufficiently wide, consciousness we are seated, from that admirable position we "assist." He therefore supremely matters; all the rest matters only as he feels it, treats it, meets it. A beautiful infatuation this, always, I think, the intensity of the creative effort to get into the skin of the creature; the act of personal possession of one being by another at its completest (Veeder & Griffin, 1986, p. 283).

Of prime importance in a story is the representation of the consciousness of a character, and it is his consciousness over which the action spills. When Milly Theale, at the threshold of death in Venice in *The Wings of the Dove* (2004), turns her face to the wall (when Merton Densher excites her to fall in love with him) is represented as "a New York history,..., legend..., a set of New York possibilities" (p. 130). A main intension of the story is perhaps to illustrate her consciousness as the encapsulation of the whole history of a culture. If her performance is not as heroic as those of Hamlet or Romeo, her consciousness is perhaps the large window through which we can look at a whole history of experience.

CONCLUSION

In the nineteenth-century the English novel mainly wanted to be a realistic imitation of life, and the readers of fiction expected to become better citizens through socialization and the promotion of their consciousness. However, the present reader believes that the modern English novel, a department of which is the fiction of James, uses the sources of language not excluding for the betterment of morality, but also (and mainly) for creating spaces where the sign plays freely and the reader finds occasions for practical criticism and interactive interpretation.

James's novels do not necessarily have a social or political point. They are neither stories of situation, nor sociological treatises in which we read about our duties to other people. They are art, stories which should be read mainly for critical appreciation and interpretation. And

James the artist of interpretation is tirelessly interested in the formal dimensions of his work. If not for the complex knowledge about his international theme or for the psychological enlightenment that he can give us, we can read him for his wit and for the pleasure of his language. The real preoccupation of James in his later style is not telling but showing. He is more interested in the how of storytelling – point of view, style – than in what of it – events, narrative progression, and the details of what happens. In this way, in James we learn how to think about what we read, to interpret our readings, and to re-write them while we use our own language and develop our own perspectives.

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